

When you're 'just visiting' in Jackson

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

Some visitors to Jackson come and stay a lifetime. Unfortunately, they're confined to the state prison and never see anything of Jackson except on the bus ride in.

Why would they want to, you might ask? What else is there in Jackson?

Twenty-three thousand acres of recreational land for starters. The Jackson Convention and Tourist Bureau bills its hometown as "Jackson, recreation country."

Skeptical? We were too until we took a personalized tour led by convention bureau director Pamela Pond.

Jackson, we found, has more than its share of three things — golf courses, parks and native born and/or bred astronauts. And whether you're speaking of Jackson, the town, or Jackson, the county, we discovered more than enough Jackson to fill a day, a weekend or an extended stay.

Jacksonians are particularly proud of the wealth of golf courses. Eighteen public golf courses and two private clubs make it the undisputed golf capital of Michigan.

It's the second best area in the United States for golf when it comes to most number of public golf courses per capita, says the National Golf Foundation.

One of the most popular courses is Cascades Golf Course, owned by the Jackson County Parks Commission and recognized by Golf Digest as one of the nation's top public courses.

"The best bang for the buck" is how some experts describe it. A weekend round of golf is \$11 for 18 holes. A two-person cart is \$16.

CASCADES, the golf course, is just a part of the Sparks Foundation County Park, more commonly referred to as Cascades Park. Park visitors can enjoy tennis, miniature golf, paddle boat rides, basketball and special activities on the expansive grounds.

It's too late for this year, but from Memorial Day until Labor Day the park hosts a spectacular show nightly — Cascade Falls. It's Jackson's most famous monument, a 500-foot-high, man-made system of 18 waterfalls open nightly 7:30-11 p.m. for a show of dancing waters and colored lights.

Not too far away is the 535-acre Ella W. Sharp Park, a city-owned park which includes the 18-hole Sharp Park Golf Course as well as tennis, picnics, volleyball, swimming pool, softball, baseball and soccer fields and playgrounds.

It's also home to a lovely treasure, the Ella Sharp Museum, sort of a mini, manageable Greenfield Village, the type of place you can get through easily well before the feet give out and the kids start whining.

Focal point of the museum, once a busy family farm in the 1800s, is the Victorian farmhouse with period furnishings in every room from the elegant parlor to the attic toy room.

Other structures include the tower barn, which houses farm implements, a woodworking shop, print shop and doctor's office, all of which are part of the original homestead.

Two additional buildings, a one-room school house and an authentic log cabin have been brought to the site from other parts of Jackson.

ON THE GROUNDS, you'll also find Heritage Hall, a gallery which reflects Jackson County history and art; the Peter F. Hurst Planetarium; and the Granary, a small attractive tea room and ice cream soda fountain which serves lunch until 4 p.m.

The museum is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Admission fee is \$5 for families. The planetarium shows are 3 p.m. Sundays, mid-September through mid-June, for a nominal fee.

Yet another park-type setting is the 200-acre Dahlem Environmental Education Center on the Jackson Community College grounds, 7117 S. Jackson Road.

Nature lovers can explore five miles of trails through forests, marshes and fields originating from the visitors' building which houses exhibits. One special attraction is a half-mile special needs trail for easy walking. A rail fence is built along side the entire length to aid walkers. Visitors can drop in for free hiking, walking, cross country skiing at any time. The visitor's building is closed Monday. It's open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and noon-5 p.m. weekends.

Also on the Jackson Community College grounds is the Michigan Space Center, "the biggest little space center on earth."

The MSC houses \$30 million in space artifacts, many on permanent loan from NASA, the Smithsonian Institution and private industry.

The whole idea started in 1971 with a contest by Jackson Community College to create a sign honoring Jackson's astronauts (Al Worden, Jack Louma, James McDevitt and Ed White). It mushroomed into a museum.

A SPACE CENTER visitor can view a moon rock through a microscope, try on an astronaut helmet, take a simulated ride in a capsule, step on a scale to compute his or her weight on other planets, look inside a pretend black hole and ask questions, questions, questions of director James Satterelli. (Like how do the astronauts go to the bathroom. Diaper rash used to be a real problem, says Satterelli.)

Some other Jackson County sights of note which are not open all the time and require advance planning:

• Michigan International Speedway. The Miller High Life 400, the Marlboro 500, the International Race of Champions and the Champi on Spark Plug 400 were all here in 1989. For information on future schedules, call 951-1922.

• Jackson Harness Raceway. The fall meet is through Oct. 14. Post time is 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday. For more information, call (517) 788-4500.

• Ye Olde Carriage Shop. You'll have to be part of a group of 20 or more to get Lloyd Ganton or his son Troy to open the door to this Spring Arbor private collection. Inside you'll find two dozen antique cars including four one-of-a-kind automobiles and 10 which were built right in Jackson.

You'll also find 20 antique gas pumps dating from 1905 to 1950 and showcase after showcase of other automobile memorabilia.

In addition to the automobile-related collection, there's a Coca-Cola room with Coke bottles, glasses, trays, signs, toys and anything else which carries the world-famous logo. A soda fountain from an upper Michigan soda shop, complete with wooden booths and those spin-around stools contributes to the nostalgia.

TO ARRANGE a visit — remember, groups only — call the Gantons at (517) 750-1905.

• Conklin Antique Reed Organ Museum. More than 70 reed organs are displayed in the former Hanover High School in Hanover. It's open 1-5 p.m. the first and third Sundays April through October. Call (517) 563-2311 to arrange group visits.

• Fox Hill Farm. This Parma farm grows herbs, lots of herbs, maybe 450 of them, as well as fragrant plants, scented geraniums and specialty vegetables. It's open April 15 to Oct. 15, but it's best to call first at (517) 531-3170.

For more information, maps, directions or suggestions for accommodations or restaurants in Jackson County, call the Jackson Convention and Tourist Bureau, (517) 788-3330.



Pam Hutchinson lifts up her five-year-old daughter Kristin for a closer look at display in the Michigan Space Center, while her son Paul, 7, patiently waits his turn.



At the Ye Olde Carriage Shop, groups of 20 or more may get a guided tour of the private automobile collection from Troy Ganton.

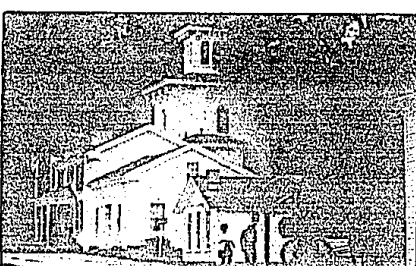


photos by DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Lenora Rogers, 7, and her friend Stephanie Powers, 8, walk the trails of the Dahlem Environmental Center with her grandmother Gina Rogers.



You might not find the likes of Arnold Palmer or Jack Nicklaus on the greens of Cascades Park Public Golf Course, but the two golf greats have teed off there.



Referring to a map, Dawn and David Hicks explore the buildings that make up the Ella Sharp Museum in Jackson.

Seeing Jackson in a day

Jackson's closer than you think — 55 minutes from Plymouth, 75 minutes from the Bloomfields, maybe 90 minutes from Troy.

A daylong stay will give you a good look at the variety of family-oriented attractions around Jackson, the city, and Jackson, the county.

Here's a sample itinerary for a family day trip:

• Take I-94 west to exit 142 and follow the signs to the Michigan Space Center on the Jackson Community College campus. It opens at 10 a.m. Plan to spend 1½-2 hours. If you and your youngsters are into space travel and its memorabilia. The museum is small but chock-full with items of interest. There are picnic tables and play equipment outside. Admission is \$3 for adults, \$2 for students or \$9 for the family.

• Now it's on to the Dahlem Center, only minutes away. Turn left at the end of the space center drive onto Emmons Road. Turn right at Kimmel and right again at South Jackson Road. Follow the signs. The center has five miles of walking trails, as short as a few minutes. No charge.

Lunch time could find you dining in the Granary at the Ella Sharp Museum. Yes, that's just minutes away, too. Take South Jackson Road to Horton Road. Horton Road runs into Fourth. The intersection is at the site of the museum.

Stay and play in Ella Sharp Park or try a trip through the 500-acre Cascades Park, center of the world-famous Cascades Falls. Take Fourth Street to High Street. Turn left and take the street into the park.

• A visit to Jackson is not complete without a visit to the famous Jackson All Star Dairy Ice Cream Parlor. Famous, despite the fact that it never advertises. An ice cream cone is still under \$1. Take Brown Street from the park, but watch the road signs; the name quickly changes to McDaniel. The dairy is on your right.

Jackson has a variety of restaurants near its attractions, including Brandywine Pub and Food, near the Ella Sharp Park, and Gilbert's, known for its famous Tiffany lamp collection.

If you're having so much fun you want to spend the night, Jackson has a dozen hotels, motels and inns, including a Holiday Inn Holiday home with an indoor pool, game room and miniature golf course.

For dining guides or lists of accommodations, call the Jackson Convention and Tourist Bureau, (517) 788-3330.

Just a few more sites to see —

Late summer and early fall are as good a time (and reason) as any to visit Jackson County. If you need more reasons:

• Sept. 1-30 — Harness racing at Jackson Harness Raceway. Post time is 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$2.

• Sept. 16 — Ella's Family Festival 1-5 p.m. on the Ella Sharp Museum grounds. Games, prizes, refreshments and entertainment.

• Sept. 23 — Family Farmstead on five area farms. Escorted tours of modern farming operations every half hour 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

• Sept. 24 — Fall Festival noon to 5 p.m. at the Dahlem Center. Food, entertainment, honey harvest demonstration, cider pressing, guided walks. Admission free.

• Oct. 1 — Fall Heritage Festival 1-5 p.m. at Conklin Antique Organ Museum. Cider pressing, sheep shearing, basket making, spinning and local artists displaying and selling their crafts. Lunch available. Admission \$1.50.

• Oct. 1 — Fall Harvest Day and Art Fair, noon to 5 p.m. on the Ella Sharp Museum grounds. Demonstrations of early farm tools including cider pressing and corn shelling. Admission \$2.50 for adults, \$1 for seniors.

• Oct. 8 — Pioneer Day at Waterloo Area Farm Museum.

For maps, brochures and other information on Jackson County attractions, call the Jackson Convention and Tourist Bureau, (517) 788-3330.